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Dear Mr. Brandt:

I have been increasingly concerned with the current deadlock in the discussions between the developing world and the industrialized countries. I recall our conversations about this in the past, and remember your sincere concern. Therefore, in considering how to break this deadlock I am anxious to make a reference to you in a speech that I propose to make in Boston on January 14. The relevant part of the text is quoted below.

"In view of the continuing impasse at official levels, it seems to me that there might be more hope of reaching a basic understanding among the rich and poor nations on fundamental development issues, if a high-level but deliberately unofficial and private commission were organized to examine the problem and to suggest, on politically practical terms, action to be taken by both developed and developing nations.

Such a private commission should clearly be drawn from individuals from both the rich and poor nations who have either had practical political experience in dealing with development issues or who have demonstrated outstanding professional competence in development economics.

The chairman and convenor of such a commission ought to be a person of the great political experience and stature, say, of Willy Brandt, the former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Other members might include such individuals as Sir Arthur Lewis, the distinguished Caribbean development economist; L.K. Jha, the former Director of the Reserve Bank of India; and Jan Tinbergen, the outstanding Dutch development strategist and Nobel Laureate in economics.

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December 27, 1976

These individuals, or others of their experience and accomplishment, would have the advantage in such a commission of collaborating not as official representatives of particular countries or blocs of nations, but rather as international figures of recognized competence and independent judgment, whose mandate it would be to formulate those basic propositions on which global agreement is both essential and possible.

The cost of such an effort would be modest and to ensure the independence of the commission it might be shared by several national governments, international institutions and foundations. I already have received indications from Minister Pronk of the Netherlands and from Mr. David Hopper, President of Canada's IRDC, that they will be willing to consider participating in such financing.

Such a commission cannot be expected, of course, to provide an instant, comprehensive, all-purpose solution to the problems of development--for none exists.

But what one could realistically expect from such a private, high-level, independent group is the careful identification of politically feasible areas of action which can command public and legislative support in the rich and poor countries alike and hence move the international development community beyond its current impasse.

There will be some critics who say that it is fanciful to suppose that the rich and poor nations--all of them politically sensitive over their own national prerogatives--can come to any meaningful understanding over development issues.

I do not believe that is true.

What I do believe is that such an understanding is unlikely to come about in the current international climate of contentious debate.

What is essential is to determine the overall volume of additional aid and trade support that the developed nations should supply; the additional policy reforms and structural changes the developing nations should undertake; and how these two mutual efforts can be more effectively applied to meeting the basic human needs of the absolute poor.

It is true that the world today is divided on a whole spectrum of issues: political, economic, ideological, cultural.

.../...

December 27, 1976

It would be naïve to pretend otherwise.

But surely there is one issue on which none of us can disagree.

And that is that the human degradation of absolute poverty must be ended--can we not accept that we should be far on the way to achieving that goal by the beginning of the next century?"

I would not wish to make the reference to you without your knowledge and consent. If, as I hope, you agree to my speaking in these terms, I would not, repeat, not take this to mean that you had bound yourself to any future course of action.

Could you let me have your reaction as soon as possible.

With sincere regards and best wishes for the New Year.

Robert S. McNamara

Mr. Willy Brandt